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FOR EUR/CE, DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY FOR ED ROSSI, COMMERCE FOR
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SUBJECT: POLISH MFA OPTIMISTIC ABOUT PUTIN VISIT AND
RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

REF: A. MOSCOW 1397

1B. WARSAW 146

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR DAN SAINZ FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)
)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Despite controversy sparked by a recent Russian documentary about Poland's alleged alliance with Nazi Germany in the run-up to World War II, the Polish MFA appears to be upbeat about Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's scheduled visit to Poland for the September 1 commemoration in Gdansk of the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. In addition to addressing historical issues that continue to plague Polish-Russian relations, MFA officials expect the visit finally to resolve navigation rights in the Vistula Bay and reopen commercial shipping between the Polish port of Elblag and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad for the first time since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Poland and Russia are also close to signing agreements to cooperate on cultural issues, remove radioactive waste from Poland, and combat organized crime. It appears that Putin has extended his visit to Poland from just a few hours to a full day to accommodate a full schedule of bilateral and multilateral meetings with other heads of government--including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoschenko--who are attending the commemoration. The US will be represented by former Secretary of Defense William Perry.
END SUMMARY.

TAKING STEPS TOWARD NORMALCY

¶2. (C) Dariusz Gorczynski, Head of the Polish MFA's Russia Desk, told us August 26 that Putin's visit to Poland could represent an important step in shifting the emphasis of Polish-Russian relations from heated historical debate that fuels mutual animosity to discussion about cooperation on the economic, cultural, and scientific fronts. He emphasized that Poland wanted to demonstrate to Western partners that it can resolve its own problems with Russia. At their bilateral meeting, Tusk and Putin will discuss mechanisms for dealing with historical issues, including establishing joint historical institutions in Warsaw and Moscow or, possibly, Smolensk, as well as reviewing the recommendations of the bilateral Commission on Difficult Issues. Gorczynski added that Poles will be closely observing Putin's remarks at the Gdansk event. However, he downplayed the possibility that Putin would interpret historical events controversially, despite the recent airing of a documentary on Russian state television that claimed Poland entered into a 1934 non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany partly to contain the Soviet Union.

¶13. (C) Gorczynski highlighted several agreements that the two countries were expected to sign. First is a long-awaited agreement to re-establish commercial navigation rights in the Vistula Bay and re-open shipping in this area for the first time since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Poland and Russia are also in the final stages of signing agreements on cultural cooperation, a US Department of Energy-supported program to remove Soviet-era radioactive waste from Poland, and combating organized crime. Gorczynski was less certain of prospects for an agreement in the near future to secure Russian gas supplies. Current supply contracts expire at the end of this year and Poland still seeks compensation for failed deliveries from the now-defunct intermediary RosUkrEnergo dating back to January's European gas-crisis.

¶14. (C) Looking to the future, Gorczynski maintained that Poland wanted to enhance economic, military, cultural and scientific cooperation with Russia. He noted that Russia had sought advice (drawn from Poland's experience with transition economics in the 1990s) on spurring development of small and medium-sized enterprises and accelerating growth of the middle class. Polish Senate Speaker Bogdan Borusewicz (Civic Platform, PO) will travel to Moscow September 18 to discuss implementation of regional cooperation on these issues. In addition, there will be a Polish-Russian business forum in Gdansk September 2. The two countries are also discussing ways to enhance contacts between the respective scientific communities and establish a foundation to facilitate youth exchanges. Regarding military cooperation, Gorczynski said Defense Minister Bogdan Klich will probably visit Moscow this fall in an effort to renew Polish-Russian military contacts, which have largely been dormant for four years.

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RUSSIA ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

¶15. (C) Turning to international issues, Gorczynski observed that Russia successfully killed Georgia's NATO accession prospects by occupying South Ossetia and Abkhazia and supporting their independence, but the two regions have become a burden for Moscow. He wryly commented that the two regions are now "more Russia's problem than ours." On Iran, Gorczynski argued that Moscow had changed its position regarding Tehran's nuclear weapons program, saying that Russia realizes it cannot control the situation in Iran.

COMMENT

¶16. (C) Putin's participation in the September 1 Gdansk commemoration could be a key event in improving Polish-Russian relations, especially in putting some of the hard feelings of the past behind them. Polish officials will always insist on accurate interpretations of history, but the Tusk Government seems to have adopted a more pragmatic, two-track approach to its relations with Moscow. Warsaw hopes to improve political and security ties at the official level, while promoting grassroots cultural and business ties as an incremental, but effective way to change mutually negative mindsets.

¶17. (C) Participants in the commemoration will have to balance their domestic concerns against their interests in resolving historical issues with their neighbors. Prime Minister Tusk and several of his counterparts at the event also will want to be seen as vigorously defending Poland's national interests. The continuing lack of agreement on historical distortions and ongoing disputes such as past and future gas supplies will probably remain a drag on the relationship, and are likely to continue to draw negative public attention. At the same time, the signing of the Vistula Bay agreement and others, as well as the increased pace of official contacts, are promising indicators that Poland and Russia are pushing their relationship onto a more pragmatic track.

